

bloody webs and broken hands

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bloody webs and broken hands

by [rabbit_with_a_sword](#)

Summary

Adam was offered an apple. Corpse - the survivor of his class, twenty-eight to one *twenty-eight to one* - was offered three blackberries.

Shh, his classmate told him. *Don't let the others see*. Corpse was dizzy from the poison they were exposed to in order to be stronger. It occurred to him, then and looking back, that the blackberries might be poisoned, too.

Twenty-eight to one.

(Friendships in the Room are doomed to end in blood. It means less people make friends. It means that those who do will fight like their lives are on the line- because they are.)

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

It began with the cardinal sin.

Two children, who had not earned names, one of whom never will, lay next to each other at the end of the rows of beds, and one whispered "are you awake?"

Friendship is not allowed in the Room. All of the twenty-eight small children lying handcuffed to their bedframes learned to shoot three days ago.

Corpse remembers thinking, as they lay in the dark handcuffed to their bedframes, that every moment not spent resting was a moment wasted. Remembers knowing they would not be given any reprieve tomorrow, that he should ignore his classmate. The red circle tattooed behind his ear, the stamp of ownership the Room still has on him, had still been raw.

Defiance of the Room only ever ends in blood.

"Yeah, I'm awake," he whispered back.

"What do you think will happen to us tomorrow?"

Adam was offered an apple. Corpse - the survivor of his class, twenty-eight to one *twenty-eight to one* - was offered three blackberries.

Shh, his classmate told him. *Don't let the others see*. Corpse was dizzy from the poison they were exposed to in order to be stronger. It occurred to him, then and looking back, that the blackberries might be poisoned, too.

Twenty-eight to one.

Are you awake?

Yeah.

The seeds crunched between his teeth.

When his classmate's powers manifested, Corpse was the only one to know.

He froze despite all of their training. *Spiders do not feel fear*.

"Hey, hellion, I've got something to show you," His classmate said with a smile on his face and *peeled the skin off his chest* to reveal a gaping hole where his heart should be, too-sharp ribs unknitting from the cage and *reaching for him*-

Corpse remembers how they'd felt, wrapping around him, wet with drool. How the barb from one had scratched his skin. How he hadn't screamed, or run, or fought. How he'd felt them tremble, slightly, with the effort of stopping before tearing through him and dragging him into the maw of his classmate's chest.

"Isn't it neat?" his classmate had asked him, eyes alight with wonder, and released him, ribs slithering back inside their chest with a hideous squelching sound Corpse can still hear, if he thinks about it for long enough.

"It's *gross*," he'd replied, eyes shining just as brightly. "I love it."

Hellion, his classmate signed, in the moment the teacher's eyes were on the unfortunate soul who whimpered. **Hellion, do you think I have a name?**

Not yet, he signed back. **Neither of us do. Only the survivor will get one.**

No, idiot. Like you're Hellion. What's mine?

He- Hellion- was called up to dance. First position. Second. Third. Fourth. Fifth. Back to first. Perfect posture. First. Second. Third. Fifth. Fourth. Second. First. Fourth. *Hold*. Fifth. Corpse's legs ache even remembering. Hellion formed the sign for *teeth* while one hand passed over his ribs, and took a cane to the shins for it.

Spiders do not feel pain.

"Enough," the teacher snapped after thirty-one agonising minutes. Hellion was drenched in sweat as he took his bloody pointe shoes off, and sat next to his friend.

Spiders do not feel fear.

Corpse is never scared. Hellion was always scared. Maybe there isn't a difference.

It was dark. Corpse remembers that much. In Siberia, they were told to survive two weeks, and to kill at will. In Cuba they were told much the same. He's not sure which of the two this memory is.

"*Reeth?*" he gasped out, wheezing with laughter. "You got *Reeth* from the name-sign I gave you?"

"I dunno man, it's like rib-teeth! Stop laughing, we're gonna get cau-hau-haught!" Reeth dissolved into giggles alongside him, two boys laughing in the dark while the darkness lay thick and smothering over the woods and their classmates hunted each other and fought for survival only a stone's throw away.

"You didn't eat," he said.

"I can't," his friend replied. "This is my mouth now, I can't- I've tried eating the berries, and they taste as sour-sweet as ever, but- nothing the Room gives me stays down anymore. Should I tell them? Do you think I should pretend to manifest tomorrow?"

Corpse remembers how terrified he'd been to even think it, a ghost of the old terror rising up even now. The Room is all-knowing. The Room is *right*. The Room would never do anything that the weak do not deserve to die to. But it never starved one student at a time, only the class. They did not deserve to be individuals, yet.

"... Not yet," he said slowly, tasting the extra rebellion on his tongue. "The best weapon is one they don't know you have."

Spiders spin webs of deception. This, of all the commandments of the Room, Corpse has never broken.

Widows focus more on ballet. Widows also learn more about luring in their targets. Unlike the Huntsmen, they spin webs of beauty and wait with endless patience for their target to blunder into it.

Corpse often thinks he would've made a better Widow than Huntsman.

He is what he is, the empty space inside his ribcage reminds him, and his kill-count is the highest the Room has ever seen.

One of the other classmates didn't like Reeth. Corpse remembers the set of his jaw, rather than his number or appearance or skill. None of that was important, except the way his face twisted when he saw Reeth. Hellion had overheard him talking to others about making sure Reeth wouldn't survive the next exercise, waited for him in the showers, and snapped his neck.

Twenty-seven to one.

"Hellion? Are you—" Reeth cut himself off when he saw the body.

Hellion stood over it silently. Corpse still doesn't know what Reeth saw in his face that made him take hold of the skin of his chest and peel it back, freeing his rib-teeth to rip into it.

Hellion was going to explain himself. He really was.

Bloody goblets of flesh were caught on barbs, dragged into the gaping maw of Reeth's chest by a dozen dripping bones, tearing the body to shreds until it was unrecognizable, and all the while Reeth had looked into his eyes. Hesitantly (spiders do not hesitate, they lie in wait or *strike*) he'd crouched, and dragged his fingers through the pool of blood at their feet.

"No better weapon than one they don't know I've got, right?" Reeth grinned, before delivering a final kick to the pulp of meat left on the shower floor.

"Take *this* for useless and powerless, Nine!"

Corpse does remember, now. Nine. The number only sits in his mind in a furious undertone directed at a mutilated corpse, in a voice long since silenced.

"They're going to kill us."

"They're going to kill *me*," Reeth corrected, smile turning sadder. "Twenty-eight to one, though, right?"

To this day Corpse doesn't know who had the idea first.

"How many do you think I can-"

"Did you want to try and-"

Hellion stopped. "You go first."

"No, no, you go first, you have better ideas anyway."

"... It's twenty-seven to one now," Hellion said, nodding towards the bloody mess on the floor. "It'll be twenty-six to one when they catch you. You wanna try and narrow it down a little more?"

Reeth smiled, ribs shifting in anticipation.

"You better go cuff yourself to bed, Hellion. Get yourself an alibi. It's time to 'manifest.'"

Hellion lay in bed with blood on his hand and listened to the wet *crunch* as Reeth made his first kill. An intake of breath; someone else was awake. Silence reigned for nine seconds - nine seconds burned into Corpse's memory like the shape of the timber is burned into his face - before the sounds of Reeth eating were audible, and his classmate *screamed*.

"HELP! HELP, PLEASE, THERE'S A MONSTER IN HERE, *HEL-*"

Schnt.

The damage was done. The class was awake, struggling to flip their bedframes over so they had a barricade between them and Reeth, the weaker screaming or whimpering in fear. Blinding light struck Hellion like a blow as the guards threw the doors open.

"What's going o-"

"You'll never take me alive," Reeth snarled, and did the unforgivable.

Wait, Corpse remembers thinking. The guards can die?

Her lifeblood splattered over the children unlucky enough to be chained close to the door, and screaming began anew.

Reeth, for the first time since his powers manifested, didn't hold back.

Corpse can't remember much aside from the way he laughed, blood covering his face and sticking to his hair. He doesn't know how many guards died, only that one of his classmates

stumbled over a body. He doesn't know what the guards said, only how Reeth's laughter had echoed over the top of it and the gurgling screams they'd made when impaled.

Fear and pain made them weak, Hellion thought. If we deserve to die for that, so do they.

Whenever he thinks of that night, Corpse thinks of the way blood had felt drying tacky on his fingers. Rae thinks his habit of rubbing his fingertips together is a leftover from a deep cover mission. Sykkuno's written it off as a quirk. After all, it's not as if any Spider is stupid enough to get blood on them. It's not as if any Spider would *keep* that memory.

"FOLLOW," barked a guard, and the shaking class followed. Reeth's laughter echoed down the hallway as twenty-four students followed in his wake. Fifteen took a moment to kick the guard who'd always been freer with the taser, hurrying to rejoin the group.

Reeth was tangled with two guards, spitting blood and insults.

Hellion snatched a guard's discarded gun and fired.

Corpse hit a guard. He thinks. He thinks he was aiming for a guard. He knows his classmates followed his lead, a hail of bullets leaving all three combatants dead in the dirt of the courtyard where a dozen traitors have been shot, until Eret's shout to *hold fire, little spiders, hold your fire, it's dead, stand down* brought it to a halt.

Hellion wanted, so, so badly, to pivot and fire. Hellion wanted to fire *so* badly.

"That was a... *particularly* unfortunate manifestation from Seven," Eret said, as if Corpse's friend wasn't twitching in the dirt of the courtyard with eight bullets through his body.

"Unpleasant business," they said, and shuddered theatrically. "I *do* wish we hadn't had to involve all of you..."

One of his blood-spattered classmates started crying silently. Hellion did not look away from Reeth. There was an empty space inside his ribcage.

Twenty-four to one. If Corpse survived this, he could survive anything.

Corpse twisted, and kicked, and as his classmate's punch connected with his face thought about how he wouldn't mind living if only Reeth were still there, and they fell to their knees and waited for death.

They did not have to wait long.

"Eret," he said, looking them in the eyes. "I think my powers manifested."

Testing began. Extensively. What ended up in his file was that he has a touch-based mind manipulation. One touch, and they'll do whatever he wants, and think it's their idea into the

bargain.

Corpse doesn't want to be here anymore.

"Where's 'here'?" Sykkuno asks, innocence over a lethal smile.

"... Forget I said that."

Their target has been quiet since Corpse brushed against her. Her landlord will find her body tomorrow, slumped over the bathroom sink with an empty pill bottle in hand. Corpse will be the first to know, as the thin lines of control snap. She will escape the web he's wound around her in the only way she can.

It began with the cardinal sin of disobedience. Of friendship. It ended in fire, as Corpse coughed up smoke, as he sobbed under the cover of smoke irritating his eyes, as he wanted nothing more than to *burn* with the targets, and yet climbed free from the building of his own free will.

No. That wasn't right.

He'd climbed free from the burning building because... because...

Because Eret said to be safe, Corpse realised, the knowledge that even the final escape was denied him rising up from some subconscious part of his mind. *I'm alive because Eret said to be safe*.

It ended in the prayer the Room calls hatred.

Corpse has burns littering the side of his face and down his neck and a smoke-roughened throat and there is an empty space inside his ribcage where love and loss and a hundred things the Room commands them not to feel are crowded.

Twenty-eight to one. I narrowed them down for you, Hellion.

End Notes

literally the only thing I changed is the numbers so that Seven ate Nine :)

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